

## STAFF REPORT

To: Finance Committee

From: Roderick Simmons, Parks and Recreation Director

Subject: Food Lion Skate Park

Date: January 26, 2016

### Background:

During the current fiscal year, staff examined opportunities to enhance efficiencies and effectiveness within park operations and recommended shifting the Food Lion Skate Park from a staffed model to a self-service model. The Finance Committee reviewed and approved the recommendation in the fall of 2014. With the implementation of the self-service model in December 2015, members of the City Council received complaints from some residents. In an effort to provide further information on the shift, the following is provided.

The Food Lion Skate Park opened in 2001 as the City of Asheville's (City) first municipal skate board park. Construction was funded by the City with sponsorship from Food Lion. On-going operational expenses are funded by the City's general fund.

Originally, skate park operations included temporary staff who collected revenue and whose presence was intended to minimize the City's liability. Temporary staff also provided services such as classes, camps and special events. The skate park fee structure – which was in place from 2001 through 2015- included admissions, class registration, equipment rental and concessions. Temporary staff was hired annually during the season to open and close the park and collect fees. The temporary staff were not responsible for the users of the facility at any time.

As part of maximizing the efficiency and effectiveness of skate park operations, research was completed that indicated the national trend over the last ten years is that skate parks are designed to be self-service; separately offering a variety of skateboard opportunities such as classes, camps, expositions, tournaments, open skate time, and other activities. This model of non-staffed parks is largely due to changes in state laws regarding the liability/responsibility of the owner and operator. Of the 16 municipal skate board parks studied in North Carolina, 11 are operated as self-service and do not have staff on duty at the park.

In recent years, direction was given to assess the operations of the City's regional special recreation facilities including the Asheville Municipal Golf Course, WNC Nature Center, Aston Tennis Center and the Food Lion Skate Park. To date the Golf Course is leased to a private golf management operator eliminating all City subsidy; and the Tennis Center and Nature Center are on multi-year revenue plans to minimize City subsidy.

In the most recent operating budget, FY 2014-2015, the skate board park annual budget showed revenue at \$26,000, and expense at \$95,000, with a City subsidy of nearly \$70,000, or 73%.

As a result, funding related to the skate park operations were amended in Fiscal Year 2015-2016 shifted it to a self-service model in December 2015. In the event the Finance Committee wishes to reconsider the self-service model, the following options are available:

- (1) recommend to City Council a budget transfer in the amount of \$54,000 to restore temporary staff and operational cost effective on date of adoption for the remainder of the current fiscal year;
- (2) request that the restoration of funding for temporary staff and operational cost at the skate park be added to the list of priorities for consideration in the Fiscal Year 2016-2017 budget process; or
- (3) suggest that interested members of the public develop a plan to raise funds that can be committed for the on-going funding of temporary staffing and operational cost at the skate park.

The shift to a self-service model is expected to result in the following:

- Enhanced customer benefits such as expanded hours for greater park access and free admission;
- Overall increase in park use;
- Significant increase in participation in camps, classes, expositions and tournaments;
- No shift in criminal behavior in a manner similar to other unstaffed recreation facilities; and
- Minor vandalism on the same level as other unstaffed recreation facilities.